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THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IN REVELATION

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In the 17th and 18th verses of the 13th chapter of Revelation we read: (17) "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (18) Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred three-score and six." Did John write all of the above verses and, if so, what do they mean? The Church Fathers explained them as prophetic and tried to discover the name of Antichrist from an interpretation of the mystical number. Irenaeus, *contra Haer.* 5, 29-30, writing between 180 and 190 A. D., was the first, so far as we know, to busy himself with the problem. He was troubled by the fact that some manuscripts or writers gave the number as 616, but was sure that it was an error, as he had just shown to his own satisfaction, that 666 was necessarily right, for the flood came in the 600th year of Noah and the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. He accordingly interpreted only the number 666. For this he gave three names, that satisfy the conditions, ευανθας, τειταν and λατεινος. Each of these names, if you take the numerical values of the Greek letters and add them, gives the total of 666. Irenaeus recognized that many other equally satisfactory names could be fashioned.

Andreas of Caesarea in his Commentary on Revelation (Migne, Greek, vol. 106) has seven similar names: λαμπετις, τειταν, παλαιβασκανος, βενεδικτος, κακος οδηγος, αληθης βλαβερος, and αμνος αδικος, each of which gives by the same system of addition a total of 666.

Most of these names are repeated by Arethas, who in his Commentary (Migne, Greek, vol. 106) adds λατεινος from Irenaeus and ο νικητης, which is perhaps original.

Primasius (Migne, Lat., 68, 194 ff.) has two names, *Antemus* and *Arnoume*. These, if written in Greek letters (αντεμος, αρνουμε) also give 666 as the numerical total.

Victorinus (Migne, 5, 339 ff.) gives the names τειταν, *diclux*, αντεμος, and γενσηρικος; the last he calls Gothic. As it is plainly

Genseric, the Vandal king, who captured Rome in 455 A. D., the passage as a whole can not go back to Victorinus, who belonged to the third century. It is not, however, surprising that the commentary should be brought up to date, after Genseric became notorious through the sack of Carthage or of Rome. Of the other names in Victorinus only "*diclux*" needs mention. It is said to be the Latin counterpart of τειταν and by reckoning each letter at its value in Roman numerals (D = 500, I = 1, C = 100, L = 50, V = 5, X = 10) the total of 666 is again given.

The Venerable Bede (*Explan. in Apoc.*) gives only the three well-known names, τειταν, αντεμος, and αρνουμε.

The Spanish monk Beatus in his commentary has eight names of which *damnatus* (δαμνατος = 666), *Antichristus,* and *acxyme* (ακχιμε error for αιχιμε or αχινε = 666) are not found elsewhere. The numerical interpretation of Antichristus is based on the order of letters in the Latin alphabet, a = 1 to x = 300, but the accusative must be taken and spelled Antechristum.

This system of explaining the number survives even today, as a letter written me in 1906 well illustrates. It is too long to quote in full. It was written in explanation of a request for criticism of the Latinity of several titles or alleged titles of the Pope. One of these, *Vicarius filii Dei,* the Vicar of the Son of God, had been explained in a book entitled *The Reformation,* which stated that, if the numerical values of all the occurrences of C, D, I, L, V(U) are added, the total is 666. The writer obtained the same result from another supposed title *Filius Latinus solis diei,* the Latin son of Sunday, which he evidently thought showed that the Pope was instrumental in establishing Sunday as the holy day of the Church. It would seem that with this style of interpretation the field of possibilities had been pretty well exhausted, though the present war has added an ingenious equation by which kaiser gives 666.

In general in modern times a different system of explanation of the number of the beast has been in vogue. Instead of trying to figure out who the Antichrist will be or when he will come, scholars have tried to identify the number with some ruler, oppressor of the Church, and so fix the date when Revelation was written. Thus the Rev. Geo. Edmundson, in the Bampton Lectures, Oxford, 1913, p. 173, after an able discussion in which he shows that both statements and imagery in Revelation agree better with a supposed date 70 A. D. than with that of 96 A. D., adds

in regard to the number 666 and its variant 616, that the "generally accepted solution" identifies both with Nero. "For if the Greek spelling of Nero Caesar be transliterated into Hebrew and the numerical values of the Hebrew letters be added together they make 666. If, however, the Latin spelling be treated in the same way, the total comes to 616."

This statement will hardly bear critical examination. What he evidently means is that the Hebrew נרון קסר adapted from the Greek form of the name gives 666, while נרו קסר following the Latin gives 616. But we may well question, whether even an ignorant Jew could have so spelled the name of Nero during the first century. Especially awkward is the presence of ו in נרון, while קסר not קיסר is written. The Latin form of the name giving 616 is preferable, if one must be adopted, but even this is easier to explain, if we suppose the number was known before the identification was made.

The same number for the beast, 616, is found in the Anonymous commentary on Revelation, published in the works of Augustine (Migne, 35, 2417 ff.) and in a Greek manuscript of the New Testament minuscule 5. It is claimed by von Soden for MS C (Codex Ephraemi), but this must be an error as a long lacuna begins in C at Revelation 13:16. The reasons given by Irenaeus for his approval of the number 666, added to the mystical appearance of that number, would sufficiently account for the practical disappearance of 616, even if it were original.

The whole problem has been brought into a new stage by the discovery, that the verse, 13:18, is omitted in the text of Beatus.

It has long been recognized that Beatus derived much of his commentary, and so probably his Bible text, from the lost commentary of Ticonius (390 A. D. North Africa).[1] An English translation of this text was published by E. S. Buchanan, New York, 1915, based on the thirteenth century manuscript in the Morgan Collection (New York). During the summer of 1916 I was able to study several manuscripts of Beatus in Italy and Spain. One of these appears to be the parent of the Morgan manuscript and on the basis of this and six others of the tenth or eleventh century it has been possible to reach definite conclusions concerning the Bible text of Beatus. The text is given twice in

[1] J. Hausleiter, *Zeits. f. kirch. Wissenschaft u. kirch. Leben*, Leipsic, 1886, pp. 239-257.

every manuscript, the first in long passages at the head of each section, the second written in red, sentence by sentence, throughout the commentary. The two texts are quite different though both are Old Latin texts. Both show errors which could have originated only in commentaries. One must have come from the Ticonius commentary, both may be originally derived from that source. On the passage under discussion their evidence is decisive. Text I omits vv. 17 and 18; text II, all of verse 18. The number of the beast is thus missing in both texts. Yet it appears in the commentary and in fact the commentary closes with a passage, which is close to verse 18 in form, but well illustrates the commentary origin of the verse: "Hic est sapientia; qui habet intellectum, computet numerum bestiae. Numerus enim hominis est, id est Christi, cuius nomen sibi facit bestia; quantum enim adtinet per singulas litteras, hunc numerum nomenque explebit interpretaturque sic: DCLXVI."[2]

Similarly the anonymous Commentator in Augustine omits in the Bible text the sentence containing the number of the beast, though he has 616 in the commentary, as above noted. As both Anonymus Aug. and Beatus seem to have derived their text from Ticonius, we may assume that the Old Latin text of North Africa omitted the number. The whole of verse 18 is natural commentary addition. The identification of the number with a Roman emperor can not help us to date Revelation, but only to fix the time of this commentary addition, which doubtless first appeared as a marginal gloss. The number 616 probably appeared in the earliest form and may be connected with Nero as above. Yet it may have arisen much later than Nero's death. There was a widespread belief that Nero had been only wounded and would reappear later to establish his kingdom. Two false Neros used this belief to start revolts within the twenty years following his death and the Sibylline Oracles, composed at that time, also bear witness to the prevalence of that belief. It seems to have been especially strong among the more ignorant Jews of the city of Rome. That it persisted much later is shown by the following passage from Beatus: "Quia Iudei Christum crucifixerunt et pro Christo Neronem

[2] This is wisdom; he who has understanding, let him count the number of the beast. For it is the number of a man, i. e. of Christ, whose name the beast takes for itself; for how much this number and name amounts to by the single letters, he will reckon and thus he interprets 666.

Antichristum expectant; hunc ergo suscitatum Deus mittet regem dignum dignis et Christum, qualem meruerunt Iudei."[3] We have therefore gained little to help us date this commentary addition to the text of Revelation; but as the number 616 was disappearing before its stronger competitor 666 already in the time of Irenaeus, the former can not have arisen much later than the beginning of the second century. The possibility that 616 refers to Caligula[4] and belongs in an earlier piece of Apocalyptic literature would better explain its intrusion here.

The number 666 can not be easily identified with any of the Roman emperors on the basis of the Greek spelling. We must also remember that Revelation was in the early period popular in the West only, where Greek was rapidly yielding to Latin as the language of the church. Attempts may have been made to insert numbers corresponding to each of the earlier emperors and at first the Greek letters would have been used, but the Hebrew numerical values can not have continued in use, for none of the commentators have retained it. Nerva (Νερουα) with spelling and numerical values both Greek gives 626, or Νερβας Καισαρ, 690, and Νερβας Θεος, 642. There may well have been a tendency to seek numbers in the six hundreds owing to the early use of 616.[5] Finally the method of using the Latin spelling with Roman numerical values, as we see in *diclux* of Victorinus or the *vicarius filii Dei* of my unnamed correspondent arose. Using this system Marcus Aurelius is the only one of the early emperors that satisfies the conditions. The form of name and title under which he was worshipped, Aurelius Caesar Deus, is the one to be used and the addition V + L + I + V + C + D + V gives 666. This may well be only an interesting bit of mathematical play, but it can be urged that Marcus Aurelius ascended the throne some thirty years before Irenaeus began to write, so that the change in number from the earlier forms, such as 616, to 666 would have had ample time to establish itself in the manuscripts before our first literary reference to the problem.

[3] Because the Jews crucified Christ and expect Nero the Antichrist in the place of Christ; therefore God will send this one resurrected as king worthy of those worthy of him and as a Christ such as the Jews have deserved.

[4] See Hastings, Dict. of Bible, iv, p. 258, for discussion of this as well as other identifications.

[5] This tendency would be more natural, if 616 belonged in an earlier piece of literature, and was recognized as an insertion in Revelation.